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Aint I A Woman?

A MIDWEST NEWSPAPER OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

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whiz, whir, spin
flow, melt fly
float
blend
become
be . . . but not until
the people are free
not until there is time
to take time to be free
if that makes sense
free to exchange energy
communicate
productively create

i must not forget that i can
not love everyone now; that putting
the real truth into practice now will only
disillusion those who take it for its
verbal value
i must wait to really smile inside and pass
it on
i must reject the silly feeling to jump, scream,
enjoy the cosmos
disoriented as it is now -- not until we have all
evolved more
not until there are no more incarnations of
hitler unevolved
not until the racism/oppression that has raped
our souls
has been destroyed then we can all whiz, whir, spin
flow, melt, fly
float
blend
become
be . . .

ERICKA HUGGINS, dec. 21, 1970
niantic state prison

NOTES ON CUTTING MY HAIR

Until a month ago, my hair grew down to my waist. I wore it tied up or in a braid, and only let it down when I wanted to hide behind it or run my fingers through it. Long hair is really sensual to touch, to took at, to smell when it's clean, to wriggle naked shoulders under. Now, I thought, what is oppressive about sensual enjoyment of one's hair? I stopped using it for ornament, I stopped swinging it lasciviously in mixed company. But when I started to think about chopping it off, my stomach contracted in terror. So I kept it long and in the back of my mind wondered what was going on, what was in this fear of losing part of myself. Then, when Cindy came downstairs one night and said "Cut my hair!", I stopped thinking and cut mine off too. One of the braid strands went, and it was just very strange. The second came off, and all of a sudden I wanted to keep the last--a third of one's hair is better than none.

This first haircut came below my ears; I thought it was radical. A lot of the sensuality was gone, but I could still flick my hair across my face. I could put my hat on backwards and look like Rita Tushingham. It was still perfectly clear that I was not only a female, but an attractive female at that. Which is a nice thing to be, especially when you're still insecure about roles and models.

At the Grinnell conference I walked into a room on Sunday morning, and Ann's hair was <u>really short</u>! Linda from Iowa City was trimming it up, and all the other Iowa City women, all with Iowa City haircuts, were kibbitzing and commenting and taking turns with the scissors. So when Ann got out of the chair, I sat down--because I sort of knew that medium length hair was a transition point. Now my hair does not cover my ears, it does not swing in my face, it doesn't swing at all. It just sits on my head, and all I can do with it is push it out of my face or run my fingers through it when I'm frazzled.

Considering that at most only three inches were cut off, the changes I went through were surprisingly extreme. The first thing I noticed was that in classes I didn't have to bother about how I was coming across. I have talked to one professor outside of class, and met him at various social functions, and had felt that although I really didn't like him, and didn't like the way he taught, still there was a bond between us that had to be acknowledged. In class I had to forget that I didn't like him outside of class. I should not attack him in class, because I knew him when he wasn't being a teacher. Anyway, I went to class on Monday with short hair, and just sat and took notes and didn't look and didn't catch his eye and didn't feel involved at all (which meant I didn't feel threatened, which meant I didn't spend any energy attacking him). What I did was take notes and try to understand the subject matter.

This non-involvement occurs in a lot of different situations. When I walk through the commons, I feel much less on display. I'm freer to look for people I know, walking through is now more my business than the business of people who are looking at me. I'm doing it, and if people watch me, I don't care. I'm not touched by it. Whatever I do, I'm starting to look at from my own perspective and not as other people see me. I see the external world; I feel what I want from it; I feel my relationship with different parts of it. Much less now do I see myself as others see me, and operate either in agreement with that image or defensively against it.

I think that has something to do with no longer looking like an attractive female. It's a contradiction to look distinctively feminine and to act naturally. I was acting tough so that men wouldn't come on to me, while their response to my appearance was to come on. I was concerned with looking nice, at the same time I was actively trying not to act nice. I enjoyed relating to my hair, but refused to let men relate to it. (The rhetoric to that is: I was acting like a sexual object, and kicking people when they reacted to me as that.)

So now when I look in the mirror I see a person who really doesn't look like a girl. She doesn't look like a boy. Really, what she looks like hasn't been labelled yet. She looks like ME.

This refusal to act an established role has caused two rather heavy realizations to hit me in the face. First, the question of how seriously do I actually take myself. How much is my taking aikido based on learning to defend myself in actual, real, dangerous situations, and how much is it tied into seeing myself (from the outside) as a tough female taking aikido? There is a real difference between showing people the armlocks I have learned, and knowing those armlocks well enough to defend myself. All this talk about stomping people--when it comes down to it, will I actually be able to do it? I think it's time to stop playing around with being different images, and to start deciding what we want to do, and learning the skills we need to be able to do it.

The other bomb is related to my habit of making nasty comments to men. A friend of mine pointed out that verbally kicking them in the balls doesn't do a whole lot of good. It doesn't make <u>me</u> feel better. It doesn't make them think about anything except what a bitch I am. She said: figure out if you want to relate to people, and if you do, how you want to do it. Being a bitch is not relating to people. It's merely putting up walls which wouldn't be necessary if I would just stay away from them. Since I now feel much more in control of both whether or not I relate to men, and on what terms, I can see that it is my choice a lot of the time to relate to them or not. I don't <u>have</u> to listen to them. I can <u>choose</u> to listen to them, and choose to interact with them. If they are oppressing me, I can leave, or I can tell them how they are doing it. Instead of listening to them talk for a half hour and then knifing them between the ribs, I can object immediately. Which is a lot better for both of us. It also takes a lot of guts, a lot of confidence. So right at this time I'm choosing for the most part not to talk to them. (I can feel the nasty comments bubbling up inside me, and I know that the interchange will not be productive.)

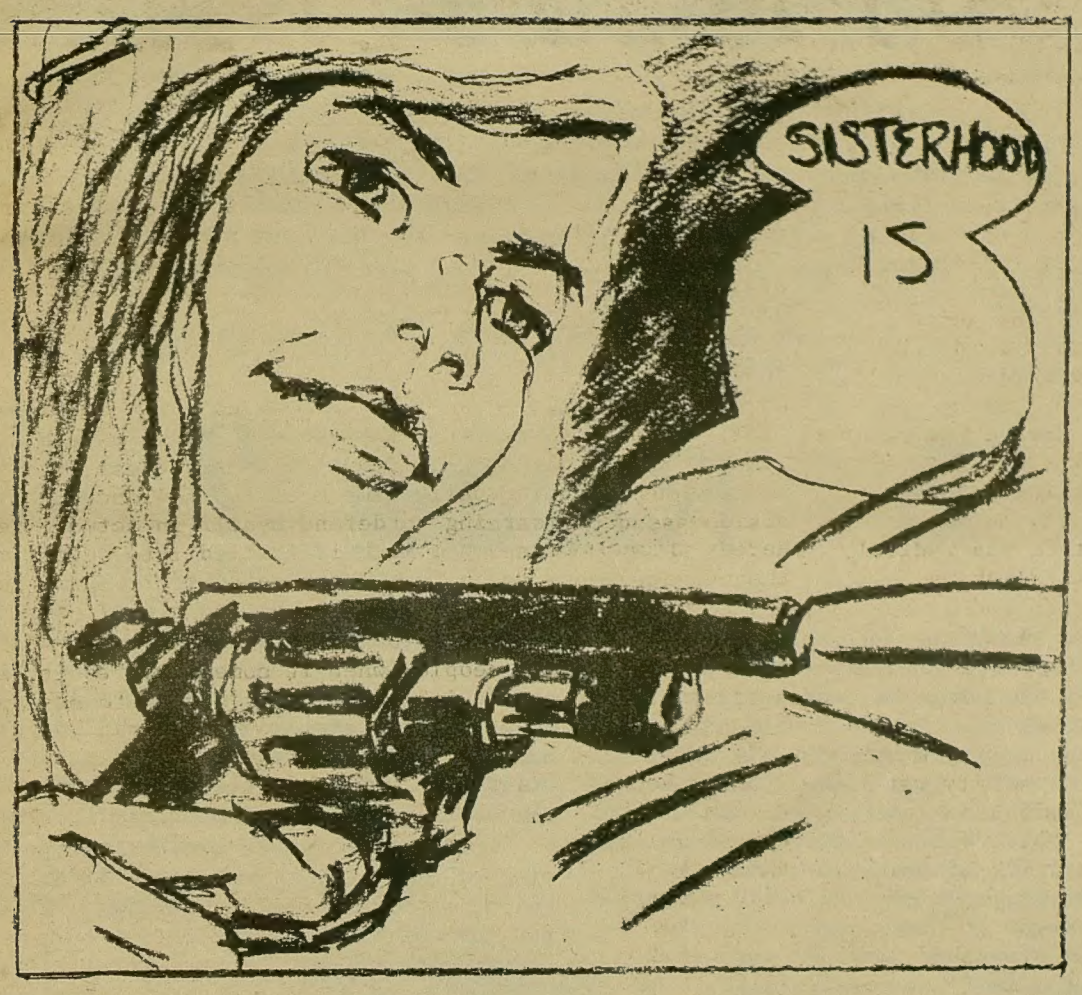
All of this really does have to do with not having hair that I can objectify. Unfortunately, I can feel myself doing the same thing with my body. Admiring my biceps, becoming strong because I dig the image, instead of thinking of strength in terms of ways I can use it. There's a difference. A woman can be physically capable of doing a lot of things, and still have a mind-set that makes it impossible for her to do them. I can see it now: a woman doing pushups in one room while five people struggle to move a chest in another. One's strength is a tool. All of one's physical attributes are tools, and one reason why I cut my hair is that it was a tool for a task I had rejected. Teeth are to chew with, muscles are to lift with, eyelashes are to keep the dust out of your eyes with, mouths are to kiss people with. And once you realize that, you spend a lot less time admiring and cultivating your teeth and your muscles and your eyelashes and your mouth, and a lot more time doing the things you can do with them.

---

the smell of me
reminds me of
the smell of you

you touched me
having touched yourself
and I feel good
to you,
to me.

now sometimes people
tell me
I'm down on myself
not naming
my indulgence
not knowing
how I love you.



My physics teacher told me that Women's Liberation would pass as an issue in two years when enough people were put out of work. I got mad and told him I didn't care about the University community and its layoff problems, (mostly men anyway). He said I was a middle-class woman who had "the time" to worry about women's rights, (as opposed to women on farms who are laboring from morning till night, not noticing their oppression he says)- I was going to hit him then. He is subtle,chauvinistic, he makes me fall apart because he is totally oblivious to the issue.

A feminist perspective is unreal to me in the university community because everything here is male-identified. My teacher believes it's the wife's fault since she lets her husband support her and where do I go from there- he doesn't understand statistics and why defend myself to him- except that he gets me into a rage, by his naivete about my power, which seems non-existent until I take his wife from him.

I am so mad at men who leave their wives after draining all their beauty, and leave their daughters deserted. Men who call homosexuals pansies for fear of their manhood and how much "fucking" you can do in one evening or whether you can "make it" with your friend'swoman. The world of men is disgusting and I have no sympathy for any man, for any reason.

I am a woman. I have no desire to be a man. I want a revolution of women leaving their men, of women loving other women, of women really castrating their men (since manhood seems to be determined by sexual prowess). Of beautiful women. I want to be strong enough to believe I can leave the man I live with. That the woman I love will stop laying her ideals of love determined by a male relationship on me. I want to eliminate men, because they are murderers and destructive and fucked up. I want to eliminate men because of how misused and misguided my self-conception was, due to my definition of myself as a woman in a man's world. I hate men for making my friend want to leave WL because we women are not yet strong enough as a group to give her the strength and support she needs, to stand with her, to not want reform but revolution, to be willing to change our life-styles.

I'm mad because I still tell of my oppression instead of acting, instead of killing them even if it's one by one.

I'm mad because every time I become a person (woman) some man tries to make me, like I was something to conquer (I suppose dreaming of the days when the white man conquered the world). I'm mad because men rape women all the time yet call something "prostitution" and make it punishable by jail. My revolution is one where women rise up and kill men, for all the murders they have perpetrated, for every insult, for every hurt.

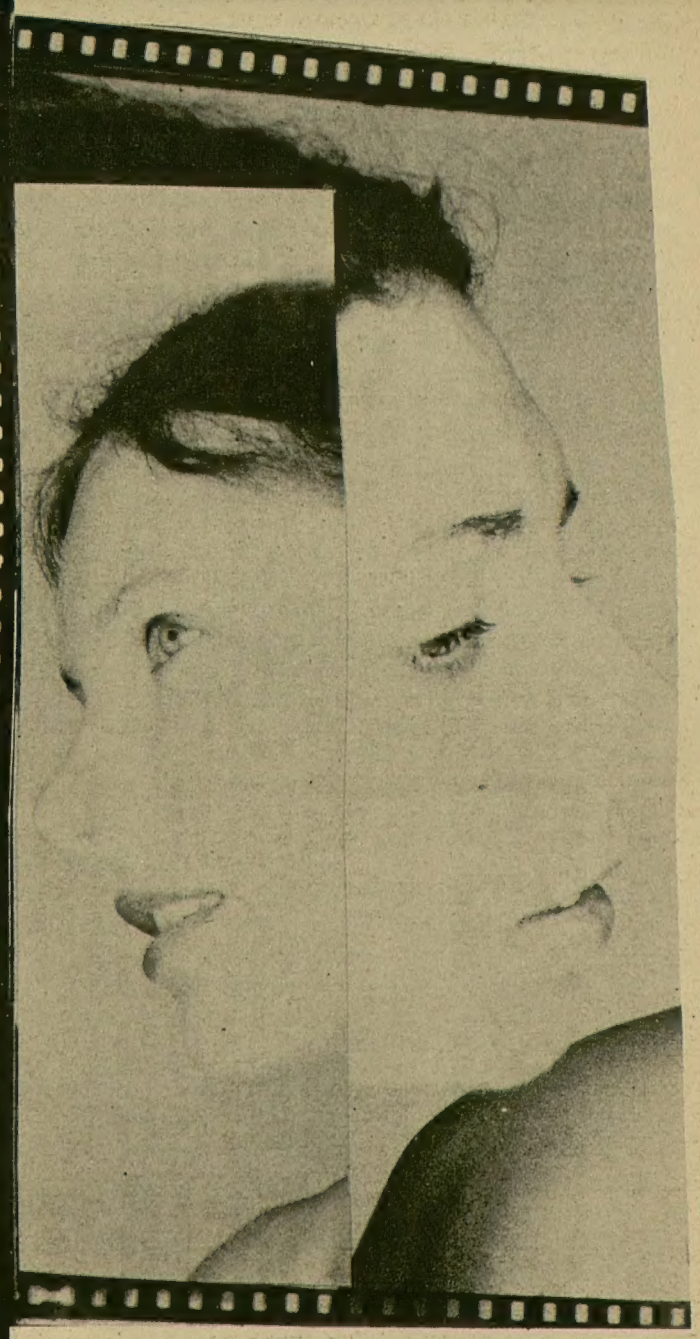
My problem in making an objective analysis is that I excuse some men for their piggishness, when they are all responsible. I see women being treated as a class, and I must make myself see men that way. Of what possible use are men? We can reproduce without them and can achieve sexual pleasure without them.

History is man and his misuse. Future is woman and her power. I think my sisters are tired of the phrase "sisterhood is powerful" because they haven't seen it demonstrated. I think the time has come for each of us to take a part in the destruction of our oppressors, thereby destroying the system that keeps us there. The time has come to be really powerful- by destroying the fathers who are fucking up their children, the husband their wives, the brothers their sisters.

Sisterhood is not just a social gathering, but a political force, that we are willing to use our bodies to free ourselves, to free our sisters from the prisons where men put them. Women's Liberation means the destruction of the power of men. Women's Liberation is the only revolution that is meaningful to me because only in the world of women can I exist as a whole person.

"Diary of a Mad Housewife" seems to be another example of a genre of movie-making where men try to show what it's really like to be a woman. I realize that a woman had something to do with the adaption, but she must have been trying to please the male audience which backs the film. After all, to see Carrie Snodgrass up there on the screen, suffering so, in her chores of being a slave to her husband and children, crying out to be loved, yet not once did the film-makers ever show the politics behind her enslavement. That they never did portray her as a person I object to, as a person by herself, for herself. I object to film-makers using women (though it should not be surprising since they are men, and the art world is no different than the real world). What this film was about, in fact,was the subtle reaffirmation that there is such a thing as an ordinary housewife, who is content or discontent with her role as a housewife, but is really not suited to be anything more than an extension of a man. I objected to every insinuation that this movie, which defines women in masculine terms was to be taken seriously by me. What it seemed to be saying was - yes, women are difficult to handle but if you play to their prince-in-shining-armour- mystique or their sadistic-male-fantasy hang-up, they can be satisfied. I resent that they played upon that part of myself that is idealistic and made it into something that is petty and stupid (as all real emotions are,defined by men).

I think I also felt betrayed, because I was led to believe that this was a movie about women and though I should have known better, I let myself believe that this one was different. I'm sick of all this pseudo-serious understanding by men of "our problem" in the form of art, of the misinformation it offers, and that it gives women the image of a Carrie Snodgrass to identify with so that they will think that their problems are not politically motivated but personally caused.



In issue # 9 we printed an article by Martha Shelley entitled "Subversion in the Women's Movement: What Is To Be Done?". In response , we received a letter from Ruthann Miller, long time member and official of the Socialist Worker's Party. We decided to print the letter because of our profound disagreement with Ruthann Miller.

We need a theory about how to make a women's revolution, about how to assure that this time there are no oppressed groups told to wait until after the revolution. We need a radical theory of how to end our oppression as women and Martha Shelley pointed that out.

Lacking that theory, women in male organizations cannot conceive of the notion that women can and must liberate themselves. Falsely believing that the structural roots of racism and sexism are in capitalism and failing to see that racism and sexism have predated and outlived socialist revolutions, women still in male-dominated socialist organizations can only have a liberal attitude toward women's liberation - a good place to organize but they wouldn't want to live here.

following Ruthann Miller's letter are three responses by members of the Ain't I A Woman? collective

WHAT ROAD TO REVOLUTION ?

An article by Martha Shelley called "Subversion in the Woman's Movement: What Is To Be Done?" has been printed recently in several women's liberation newspapers. I feel that this article contains many untrue statements and distortions, as well as some ideas which can be very damaging to the women's movement. I am sending this reply to Martha Shelley's article in the hopes of contributing to an open and fruitful discussion of these differences within the movement.

The main point of Martha Shelley's article is to attack all other women in the movement that Martha Shelley defines as "male-oriented" and urge that such women be "cast out" of the movement.

Included among the women Martha Shelley condemns as "male oriented" are women who are part of various social struggles, such as Angela Davis, Black Panther women, women from the Socialist Workers Party; women who appear in the mass media; and women who support male politicians.

It is important for us to be aware of the logic of this approach because if the various categories of women which Martha Shelley defines as male-dominated were excluded from the movement, it would mean the destruction of our movement.

Martha Shelley refers to Angela Davis and Leila Khaled, the Palestinian woman commando, as "women fighting for male causes." Not only is it wrong for feminists to consider other struggles against oppression as "male causes" and exclude women who are involved in these movements; but if all women who are involved in other struggles than women's liberation were excluded from the feminist movement, there would be little movement left. Such a policy would exclude all Black and Third World women who participate in the Black liberation movement, the Chicano liberation movement, and other Third World liberation movements. Such a policy would exclude all women who want to build the movement to end the war in Vietnam. Such a policy would exclude all working women who are fighting against their oppression as workers. These struggles can only strengthen the feminist movement. We should welcome women involved in these movements to join us. They can provide strong fighters for women's liberation. Also, we want to bring the women's liberation movement <u>into</u> these other movements; for instance, working women will be organizing within the trade unions to make them fight for the needs of women.

Martha Shelley also says that women who belong to organizations that include men should be excluded because they are supposedly "male-oriented." Again, if this policy were carried out, it would destroy the movement by excluding the vast majority of women in this country. Such a policy would mean excluding all women who registered or voted for candidates of the Democratic or Republican parties, which I would agree are certainly male-dominated. It would exclude all women who are members of trade unions. It would exclude women from such groups as the Phoenix Organization of Women. POW is a group of mainly Black and Puerto Rican women who live in Phoenix House, a drug rehabilitation center for both men and women in New York City. POW women have become very active in the New York Women's movement since August 26.

Actually, if Martha Shelley really wanted to throw all the "male-oriented" women out of the movement, she would not stop with women who associate with men in organizations only. What about all women who live with men? Should they be excluded because they are by definition "male-oriented?" This would exclude the overwhelming majority of American women. We could obviously never hope to build a mass women's movement if these women were all treated with automatic distrust when they began coming around the movement.

The reality is that our entire lives are circumscribed by men. Even women who don't live with men or join organizations with men still more than likely must work for a male employer; they must read newspapers published by males; they must live surrounded by, and relating to, sexist institutions, from the school system to the courts, to the hospitals.

The central goal of women's liberation is to end this whole system of sexist oppression. But we can only do that if we are able to involve <u>all</u> women who are ready to fight against their oppression as women. And we will not be able to reach out and involve new women if the atmosphere in the movement is one of hunting for "subversives" and "male-oriented" women and "casting them out" of the movement.

One of the organizations singled out for special attack by Martha Shelley is the Socialist Workers Party. Since almost all the statements she makes about the Socialist Workers Party are simply untrue, I would like to briefly correct these errors for the benefit of women in the movement who want to know the truth.

First of all, she says "The Socialist Workers Party is highly attractive to male-oriented women who have swallowed the line that a socialist revolution will automatically bring about the liberation of women." This is not the position of the SWP.

The SWP believes, along with many other women in the movement, that in order to lay the economic and social foundations for winning our total liberation, we must change the whole system -- we must eliminate capitalism and build towards a socialist society. But we do not think that "a socialist revolution will automatically bring about the liberation of women." A socialist revolution will not be completed until women are totally liberated.

The SWP believes that women must begin to struggle now, we must build up the power of women, through a mass women's movement which will continue to exist through and after a socialist revolution. Only by building up our own independent power will women be able to assure that our needs are satisfied.

Here is a quotation from the position of the SWP, adopted almost a year ago:

"The most important basic characteristic of the emerging women's liberation movement, the key factor which gives it such revolutionary implications, is its independence. The movement, of course, is related to and interconnected with other struggles--youth, Black and Brown liberation, antiwar, working class -- but it has its own demands, its own organizational forms. It is not simply the women's wing of an antiwar committee, a union, or a Black organization, and its fate is not <u>directly</u> dependent on the evolution of other struggles. For the first time in decades, women are saying that they are not willing to wait for anyone else to take up their struggle; they will do it now, in their own way, and they are not willing to subordinate their demands to the needs of any other struggle."

The SWP does not support the policies of the present regime in the Soviet Union, as Martha Shelley implies. We are for the overthrow of the Soviet bureaucracy. One of our strongest criticisms of Stalin and his successors is the fact that they reversed many of the gains women won in the first stages of the revolution and reintroduced reactionary laws and practices which strengthened the family and the oppression of women.

The whole section in Martha Shelley's article on the SWP sounds like it could have come directly out of "I Led Three Lives" or out of the mouth of J. Edgar Hoover. She says the SWP "has moved with frightening success to infiltrate and take over sections of the women's movement."

Another paragraph says the SWP has a "handbook" on how to infiltrate the movement, which is given only to "loyal party members." When I was reading this part to a group of SWP women, we all burst out laughing at this section, because it is so ridiculous.

The policy of the SWP is to build the women's movement, to participate in it, to learn from it, and to contribute what we can to it. We support and help to build all struggles against oppression. What Martha Shelley objects to and calls "infiltration" seems to be simply the fact that SWP women participate fully in the movement and try to build it into a mass movement.

Martha Shelley says that the SWP has "moved full-time workers into the women's centers of New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Los Angeles..." First of all, neither the SWP nor the Young Socialist Alliance, a youth organization which generally agrees with the SWP, have any members who live in Baltimore. In the other cities she mentions, SWP and YSA members have simply participated in the women's centers very actively, trying to help them grow.

Whether she is aware of it or not, the type of language and charges Martha Shelly uses to describe the SWP are all the standard charges of right-wingers against all socialists. This type of thing reached a high point during the McCarthy period in the 1950's when not only communists and socialists were persecuted, but anyone who dared to struggle at all was charged with being a communist or a "dupe" of communists..

The new movements of the 1960's have so far rejected the reactionary practice of red-baiting and purges against socialists. These new movements have set the policy that the most important thing is to unite the broadest possible forces in struggle on various issues, no matter what views people may have on other topics.

The charge that SWP women would try to "move out" feminist literature from women's centers is also false. We think that the literature that has come out of the movement, from women awakened to their oppression, is one of the most important accomplishments of the movement.

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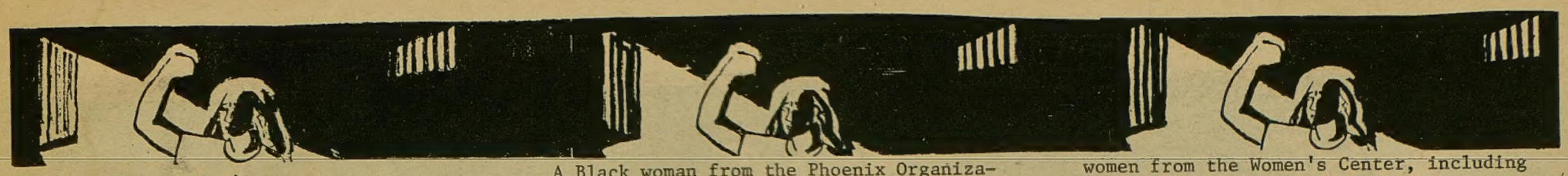


(con't from p.4)

We believe that all feminist literature should be available at women's centers, including socialist views concerning women's liberation. Does Martha Shelley think that the views of feminists who are socialists should be excluded from women's centers?

She also charges that the "SWP has considered gay people to be counterrevolutionaries." Again, this is completely untrue. We think that homosexuals are unjustly discriminated against and oppressed in this society, and we fully support the struggle of homosexuals to eliminate all laws penalizing them and all oppression of them.

I believe it is an insult to the intelligence of women in the movement to say that they are being "co-opted" or "infiltrated" by socialists. Rather than making such charges, it would be more fruitful and beneficial to the movement for Martha Shelley to deal instead with the political ideas that the YSA and the SWP have stood for in the movement.

In the New York Women's Center, Martha Shelley voted with about 30 other women to exclude YSA and SWP women from all leading bodies of the Center on the grounds that they were "male-dominated." A Black woman from the Phoenix Organization of Women also left the Center meeting, feeling that she was excluded too.

It became clear in New York that the YSA and SWP and the Phoenix women were excluded from full participation in the Center because a small section of the movement who worked around the Women's Center disagreed with the ideas that the YSA, SWP, and POW women have concerning what the New York women's movement should do.

In the New York movement at this time, women from a broad spectrum of around 30 organizations, from the YWCA to campus women's liberation organizations to the SWP, have decided to unite to form an action coalition, to plan demonstrations and other actions that could bring to bear the weight of the whole movement. Women around the Women's Center disagreed with the perspective of building such an action coalition, and disagreed with the first action projected by the coalition: a mass march of women and their children on Mayor Lindsay's home demanding public abortion clinics and childcare centers. Many of these women opposed building any demonstrations at all, and felt that August 26 accomplished nothing.

But rather than discuss these two perspectives openly within the movement, the women from the Women's Center, including Martha Shelly, resorted to the charges of "male-domination" and "infiltration" by the people they disagreed with, in an attempt to discourage women in the movement from even considering the ideas held by the so-called "male-dominated" groups. Their ideas on mass action--when they did present them at a meeting of 300 women to form the women's coalition--were not accepted by the vast majority of women. Neither were their ideas on exclusion of women accepted. The coalition decided to welcome the participation of all women.

The question of what is the best and most effective perspective for the women's movement is very important, and must be seriously discussed in an atmosphere of free exchange of ideas and democracy. This cannot be accomplished in an atmosphere of purges and "casting out" any "unpure" women.

Only with the full participation of all women who want to fight against their oppression can our movement grow and be strong.

Ruthann Miller

Socialist Workers Party
Young Socialist Alliance

Too Little Too Late

Martha Shelley was asking how to build a revolutionary women's movement. If we're interested in answering that, our theory must come from our practice, not from the practice of officials of any party. Quoting resolutions of support for the struggles of women and gay people from the SWP is about as meaningful as Richard Nixon calling for the 2nd American Revolution. I can hardly get excited about the fact that a party which is 75% male and whose leadership is mostly male has decided to grant women's liberation revolutionary potential. That Ruthann Miller is a socialist is beside the point, so is Martha Shelley by any reasonable definition. That Ruthann has a liberal attitude toward the women's movement because she's primarily interested in building socialism is directly to the point. The kind of all purpose organization she wants W.L. to be best serves the interests of those who are not motivated out of any special sense of oppression other than the general issue of living in an oppressive society. How much can one want to end the whole system of sexist oppression while working in an organization which is 75% male, not having risen up and taken control of that organization?

To say that a socialist revolution will not be completed until women are free is to put a priority on working for socialism and to keep women from gaining a consciousness as women. To want to build a mass movement without ever questioning marital institutions, domestic relationships and the whole system of patriarchy is the most reformist of politcs. Building a mass reformist movement is the surest road to single issue politics where everyone can be united on the most meaningless reform with the least struggle.

To what end, this mass movement? "To end this whole system of sexist oppression." But that level of abstraction is a sham and for SWP sexual oppression is an afterthought. How could it be otherwise? Women and gay people didn't just start being oppressed - it's that we finally got together and made enough noise that the obvious became recognized. Now the SWP resolves to fight laws which oppress gay people, but not to re-examine their ideology which allowed them to expel gay people for years from membership. Now the SWP supports the Equal Rights Amendment for women because their attitude toward women's liberation is so liberal they compete with NOW for their constituency.

If we want to broaden our understanding of what it will take to make a women's revolution we'd better start building a theory that has some understanding of the history of women organizing in America before. We'd better understand that women have worked in many ways against oppressive conditions and avoid the pitfalls we can.

We must also look at our own time, at the roots of our new consciousness which came out of the condition of living in the heart of the monster at this time.

Tentative thoughts on these things:

First things first -- The women's movement in the 19th century started to make a radical analysis of the condition of women. Radicalslike Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony questioned the domestic institutions and marital relationships - questioned how women could ever be free until these relations were radically reconstructed. They knew that so long as most women were economically and emotionally tied to men the struggle would be inadequate. They were the radicals of the time when Karl Marx was being published in the N.Y. Tribune. But their radical analysis was never completed. Many women who did not share that perspective joined the women's movement when suffrage became the goal. It was so much easier to work for what men had assumed as their right.

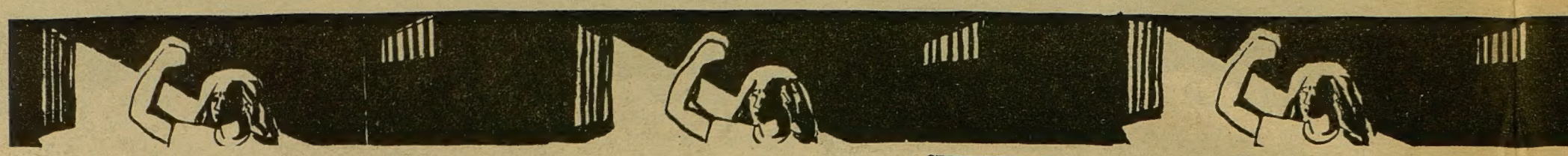
A mass movement was built around the issue of suffrage and women got what they asked for - the vote - precisely at the time when the vote was becoming meaningless in America's so-called democracy. Suffrage was no victory for women - it was a long pause in our struggle for freedom and it was a meaningless reform. Having failed to raise women's consciousness of their oppression as women - appealing to women to ask for only what men assumed as a right - the suffrage movement never prepared the ground for women to ask the revolutionary questions about the condition of women. In part, that failure left generations of women who have labored to keep from asking those questions until now. Radical feminists in women's collectives, in women's publications and in consciousness raising groups are asking those questions. Socialism to us is as the vote was to radical women in the 19th century - too little, too late. Of course a sane society operates on socialist principles - those same principles of sharing and concern for other human beings that women have always been taught. Men should learnthem - we were born socialists. But we don't get that society by voting in socialism. We become a single issue movement when we see socialism as a precondition to freedom as women - the precondition becomes the end.

We can find little comfort in the history of socialist movements per se. They can be racist, sexist and imperialist, especially when they see legal reform as their road to power. We should look to Rosa Luxemburg for an example of revolutionary consciousness to alert us to the dangers of organizing a mass movement for legislative reform. "The true dialetic of revolution is not through amajorityto revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority -- That is the way the road runs." That must be the road of our practice- our collectives, our thoughts, our groups.

We must read and understand Stanton, Anthony, Gilman and all those women who labored while suffrage became the single issue and death of feminism. Radical women lost not because they were less reasonable and less fair minded than the women who created a mass organization around suffrage. Every woman lost because a mass movement was built on shoddy politics. Everywoman will lose again if we refuse to take risks and are afraid to work for a radical reconstruction of the patriarchal system.

Something about the new consciousness of movements in the last decade. Those movements which grew - SNCC, SDS, 3rd world liberation movements - were not formless, open and fair minded the way Ruthann Miller would have you believe

continued on next page



Developing ou

CON'T FROM PAGE 5 ...

(Remember how they treated women?) These movements did not red-bait because they generally considered socialist and communist groups out-dated and irrelevant. Socialist theory as understood in America did not define the needs of youth, students, blacks, or 3rd world people - and that goes double for women. These movements grew by ignoring and at times throwing out the ideologues of a moribund American Socialist tradition. With no disrespect intended, no movement ever grew around the theories of Herbert Apthdeker or Bayard Rustin. Those struggles that took place grew by adopting a ruthless slogan, behind which was a reality we must recognize. Remember "Don't trust anyone over 30" - blacks and whites in their growing insurgent movements adopted that slogan because it was based on a reality - that the accomodations people make to survive can be damaging and the more vested interests in the established order one acquires, the less one's experiences can be trusted.

The notion that we should seek out and become women-identified women is something of that same kind of awareness: that some experiences can be damaging, that marriage, a family, good jobs, male approval and all those things individual women have accepted in this system can make them less willing to risk an analysis that goes to the heart of the woman question. That does not make us elitists or man-haters any more than not trusting anyone over 30 made those young movements "over 30 haters". It did mean those movements found out their own possibilities.

We intend to find out our own possibilities, not those possibilities defined by the SWP. How touching that they formally resolved to recognize the revolutionary potential of our independence and try to do all they can to undermine that independence. Kind of makes you wonder why they passed their resolution.

Anyone seeking independent power for women will be accused of red-baiting - an accusation made of no other oppressed group which challenges the organizing principles of SWP.

You don't get independent power for women by working in a mixed party and reporting back to your male counterparts on how good your organizing has been - how obscene those body counts must be. We know the effects of party members trying to help our movement grow and the truth of Martha Shelley's claim that feminist literature has been moved out where party workers have moved in -- we've seen it with our own newspaper.

While trying to regain control of our lives and knowing we must do for the sexual struggle what Marx did for the class struggle, while working everyday for changes so profound that a genderless society will finally be realized -- what can I care about resolutions of support stamped, signed and approved by any party's membership. Too little, Too late. I'm a woman.

The assumption that building a mass movement is what women should now be doing, I feel, has to be questioned. When the priority in political work becomes that of involving as many nubers as possible there becomes no way to avoid liberalism and ultra-democracy or the lack of ideological struggle that occur; there becomes no effective way of working except single issue organizing.

We have not as yet come very far in an anaylsis of how we end our oppression. We have recognized our position and concluded that we must have a revolution and have come some way in defining what that revolution must accomplish. What we have not been able to do is form any kind of anaylsis on how we get there. To engage in the ideological struggle to fill the gap between our recognized position and the revolution we invision, we see as crucial--more crucial than the number of women we involve.

It is the political content and the political accomplishments we have to be concerned with and this leads us to question everything we do in terms of our goals. We can't afford the stifling of ideological struggle that occurs when our main objective becomes involving as many women as possible. The tendency to try not to alienate too often leads to shuting out all ideological struggle, to altering a radical anaylsis lest we offend. To want to involve all women at whatever level on whatever they are willing to work on puts us in the position of not being able to engage in self criticism, to not be able to critize projects and actions in terms of a radical anaylsis. To engage in this sort of criticism there must be some agreement on our ultimate goals. To question legislative reform in terms of how it fits into a revolutionary perspective we must agree on some revolutionary goals. We can't engage in this kind of struggle with women who see reform as a goal in itself.

To form the anaylsis we need we will have to be able to question everything and to gain any real political change (to dare to struggle; dare to win) there will be risks to take. Unless we can recruit women around a political theory that will lead them to question and struggle with their class privileges and the heterosexual norm, the analysis we collectively reach could easily reflect the middle class, heterosexual, and racist thinking of the society we want to fight. Avoiding this reality under the guize of ultra-democracy will inhance our societal image but it will do little to achieve our liberation.

As the women's movement has grown, so have the contradictions in our theory and practice or at least they have become more apparent. We used to talk about the stigma the single woman suffers in this society, about how difficult it is to remain alone. We saw the oppression of women as closely tied to our position in marriage and the family and seemed to conclude that women must get out of that position they are forced to hold. When individual women put that theory to practice - when some women choose to remain single and others choose to end their marriages they are seen more as a threat, accused of being elite and privileged. If we believe the theory we have voiced then the practice that should follow would be to support these women, not to isolate them or treat them with jealousy and suspicion. If we recognized that marriage is an oppressive institution for women, why do we attack women who are not married and why do we work on reforming the institution of marriage to make it more bearable? We allow single women to be crit -

THE WRONG WAY

A socialist woman is a socialist first and a woman - a feminist - second. Her priorities are to a socialist revolution first and then to a feminist revolution. Implicitly she has an allegiance to a party, which in this country is upholding and legitimizing this form of government, and the illusion that people participate in it.

Socialism has not dealt with the Woman Question. A class analysis deals with workers, and in not dealing with their families, the women in their families, cannot deal with the existence of the institutions of marriage and the family. Socialism only offers women the chance to work for a feminist revolution once they have a socialist state. Women don't have to work for socialism; the society we want includes it.

The feminist movement is composed of those women whose goal is the liberation of all women, those women who work towards meeting the needs of the most oppressed women. Any other women can not, must not, be included. Ruthann Miller talks about us casting out Angela Davis and Leila Khaled. They have chosen to work in another movement, seeing their oppression differently. To include these women, to speak as if they included themselves, is to use them.

A different matter is to include those women who say they do want to be in the feminist movement, but have no place in it. You can call yourself a feminist, and use the rhetoric, yet still be working to uphold this system. The oppression of women is grounded in the oppression of other minorities - blacks, third world peoples, and homosexuals - yet Ruthann Miller seeks to organize women "no matter what views people may have on other topics," that is, dealing with single issues.

We must not confuse groups fighting for liberation with those working for change. To speak of them in the same breath is to see all those working for change as similar. Socialist Workers Party cannot legitimize itself that way, nor legitimize their criticism of us in that way.

Women have come to understand that support has both psychological and material parts to it. "We think that homosexuals are unjustly discriminated against and oppressed in this society, and we fully support the struggle of homosexuals to eliminate all laws penalizing them and all oppression of them." This statement is not grounded in practice. SWP has expelled gay people from its membership.

Their statement on women ends, "they will do it now, in their own way, and they are not willing to subordinate their demands to the needs of any struggle." That is true. Yet SWP-YSA are working to prevent just that.

This is the perspective from which Ruthann criticizes us.

our Theory and our Practice

icized for their life style, thinking we are combating elitism, while they cannot question or critize women attached to men without being accused of trying to exclude the majority of American women.

Ultra democracy draws no boundaries. No matter how many women meet together their decisions are seen as elitist because there are so many women they haven't reached or so many women not present who do not agree. Ultra democracy gives no one any power over their own lives but gives everyone power over everyone elses.

For single women to be able to survive with the social attitudes and the material conditions they must live with, they must be supported. In Iowa City a group of women formed a living collective. For some of the women involved, this living situation was imperative for their financial and psychological survival if they were to remain single and politically active. The collective instead of being supported as an attempt to set an example of women committed to living together, was attacked as elitist. The pressure from women outside the living collective made those of us involved consumed with guilt over attempting to change our lives, and caused us to spend all kinds of energy trying to make other women feel welcome at all times. (Something few married women have to do -- be pleasant and sisterly at all hours of the day or night to any woman dropping in or hanging around). To try to assure other women that we were not critical of their lives, we constantly hid the fact that we did choose this way to live -- that we do think it is a better way than being married or living alone. While bending over backwards to not interfere or put down women who lived with men or women who weren't politically active we accepted their assertions that our collective was affecting their lives, affecting the women's liberation organization, or intimidating newly involved women; therefore, that they could have some say in how we lived and how our life style fit into the whole organization. Our energies were consumed with justifying our existence rather than with working out the problems we had internally or with influencing other women to do the same.

Ultra democracy is valued only for the numbers who agree on a decision, not for the content of the decisions made. Majority rule has always hurt minorities. Independent women are a minority and will always be held down in this way unless we base our actions on sound political theory not just how most women feel -- most women are not yet ready to break the ties.

The concept of ultra democracy has also limited large groups to practice that could be agreed on by the majority which always turns out to be practice on liberal issues. Radical women are put in the position of gaining support for only liberal actions and are isolated and unsupported on any action that threatens the system.

Building a mass movement on a sound political anaylsis is quite different from building a mass movement simply for the sake of a mass movement. Masses of people can be united around anything from waging a socialist revolution to waging genocide on Black Americans. Organizing masses of women around one single issue they can agree on "no matter what views people may have on other topics" offers nothing more than the hope of winning a single issue. It offers no hope of support for other issues along basic political lines. It does offer the possiblity of an organized mass with amazing facist and racist potential. This is my fear of what women's liberation could become were it to continue to recruit on nothing other than sex lines. I keep remembering the following which came out of a movement that developed this way:

> "Consider what it (the electorate) has received during the past thirty-five years from the majority of negroes, Indians and immigrants who have been enfranchised during the time, and then judge whether women as a body, could not bring something to offset these last acquisitions. Those who fear the foreign vote and the colored vote should remember that there are more native-born women in the United States than foreign-born men and women; more white women than colored men and women."
>
> Ida Husted Harper, "Would Woman Suffrage Benefit the State, & Woman Herself?" North American Review 1904.

Our practice has been to work in small groups where we have been able to achieve some amount of collectivity in work and decision making and have come closer to a situation where all the members of a group have power in that group. We felt the need to work this way partly so we could work with other women with similar politics, not having to compromise our beliefs or water down our anaylsis to meet the approval of some mass organization. It is in the isolation of the small group that we have been able to begin an analysis -- to examine our ideas and practice without the fear of alienating potential new members.

The politics we have developed in our small groups have not however been carried over to our organizing practices. We have developed the beginning of radical theory in our small groups but we tend to feel isolated and alone in our beliefs, only finding support and agreement within our own group. Thus the small group which we maintain for support has caused us to feel isolation and a lack of support from women outside of our particular collectives. But when we try to organize other women wo don't organize them along our political beliefs or to support us. We appeal to them as women with any range of politics. We organize around lines that don't offer the possiblity of support.

We feel the reasons we formed small groups were and are still valid. To go back to a mass organization would cancel all that we have gained. When Ruthann Miller talks of the destruction of the movement she refers to a mass movement based on single issues with no basic political theory. Since we cannot see this kind of movement in any radical perspective, why should we care about its destruction? The mass organizing of women with grave differences in political theory will be the destruction of women's liberation because (1) women's liberation will have no political basis, and (2) we cannot develop any anaylsis when new or potentially new members are so powerful in determining the politics and actions. By constantly having to justify our ideas and practices, we always are looking backwards - never moving forward.

But we must solve the problems of how we avoid isolation without compromising our political theory; how we can influence other women to be in small groups (if we think that is valid); how we can facilatate ideological struggle between small groups; how much of a mass organization do we need, and how can small groups relate to a central organization without diluting their theory and practice.

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Dayton, Ohio is getting together a Regional Women's Center. Its purpose is to provide better communication within the woman's movement in SW Ohio. The address for their newsletter is:

Dayton Women's Liberation
1721 Burroughs Drive,
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The new Gettin on Women Collective's newsletter announces a woman's house in East Lansing, Michigan - women are always welcome. The address of both the house and the newsletter is:

Gettin on Women Collective
358 N. Harrison
E. Lansing, Michigan 48823

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BOD
PHYSIOLOGY OF SEX AND
HYGIENE AND HEALTH

Much of the misunderstanding about sexuality in men and women stems from incomplete and frequently incorrect knowledge of sexual physiology. This article will deal with the physiology of sex and with sex-related hygiene and health care.

I. Sexual Excitement

Many of the myths about the physiology of sex are very old: vaginal orgasm myths, clitoral stimulation myths, penis size myths, and all have contributed to unnecessary tension and unhappiness for men and women.

Sexual response in general is very much alike in men and women. In both, sexual excitement causes physical reactions over the entire body: flushed skin and muscle tension with hardened nipples and flow of blood to the pelvic area. In women the vaginal walls begin providing lubrication. Orgasm brings involuntary muscle contractions and a (usually rapid) flow of blood away from blood-engorged body areas. Usually, in men, ejaculation of semen accompanies orgasm; in women, the minor labia may turn bright red. The pattern of male orgasm varies from person to person, mostly in duration of the various stages of excitement (plateau prior to orgasm, orgasm, and resolution). In women three main types of orgasm are common: (1) rapid excitement to orgasm with almost immediate resolution, (2) excitement to plateau stage which continues for awhile then rises rapidly to orgasm with slower resolution, (3) excitement to plateau with a series of "smaller" orgasms and slow resolution. If you don't seem to respond any of these ways, don't worry about it. Whatever feels good to you is good.

After orgasm for men there is a refractory period (which varies with different people) during which you cannot be re-excited to orgasm. For many women, if stimulation is continued during the resolution phase of one orgasm, you can again have orgasm. Orgasm, although frequently assumed to be mainly pelvic in nature, is in both sexes total body response. Many women prefer continuation of stimulation during orgasm; many men prefer deep vaginal penetration and cessation of movement during his peak of orgasm. When a man and a woman with these preferences get together, it throws new light on the unrelieved marriage-manual glorification of "mutual orgasm." Find what's best for you; that's right for you.

For women, our sensual response is, thank God, usually closely linked with our emotional response to whoever we're in bed with. If all your sexual excitement is concentrated in your pelvis and breasts, it may be because you're resisting making love with that person and should more closely explore how you're feeling about him or her and the situation you're in.

Now to the common myths:

Myth #1: Vaginal Orgasm. Masters and Johnson's research proved interesting on this Freudian mainstay: There ain't no such animal. The clitoris serves the express purpose of receiving and transferring sexual stimuli, regardless of whether it's applied through intercourse, masturbation, or any other means. There is no physiological difference between orgasm which results from either direct or indirect clitoral stimulation.

Myth #2: Sexual excitement is concentrated mainly in the pelvic area, and the breast in women. Experimentation is beginning to show that all areas of the body are potentially equally sensitive. Also, Masters and Johnson argue that there is no physiological reason why men's breasts are not usually proclaimed to be as sensitive as women's. Remember what it was like when you were very small and enjoying your body was not so frowned upon. We all have bodies capable of good feelings. Your body <u>is</u> enjoyable and knowing and enjoying your own body are prerequisites to being able to give pleasure to others and enjoying them.

Myth #3: Intercourse during menstruation is (choose your own) dirty, unhealthy, unsanitary, taboo. As long as both people want to, there is no reason not to have sexual activity during a woman's menstrual period. Menstrual blood is as "clean" as semen or vaginal lubricants. For some women who have temporary swelling of the pelvis intercourse might be uncomfortable. However, many women enjoy sexual activity then because the swelling increases pleasure and the uterine contractions which accompany orgasm help expel the mentrual flow and relieve cramps.

Myth #4: Breast and Penis size are important; there is also a "correct" penis shape. Size and shape are important only in so far as the people involved are prejudiced one way or another. There's more to making love than "correct" bodies and if two people like each other and what you're doing you'll find out how to play together happily regardless of common notions about bodies and sensuality.

Myth #5: Circumcision makes a difference. Circumcised and uncircumcised men are equally sensitive and have equal ability to control orgasm.

(The above section contains a very brief overview of common problems, questions, and fears. If you want more detailed information read <u>Human Sexual Response</u>, Wm. H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson. 1966, Little, Brown & Co. or <u>An Analysis</u> of Human Sexual Response, Ruth & Edward Baker, eds. 1966 Signet Books, 75¢ in paperback.)

II. Hygiene and Health (especially for women)

<u>Cystitis</u>

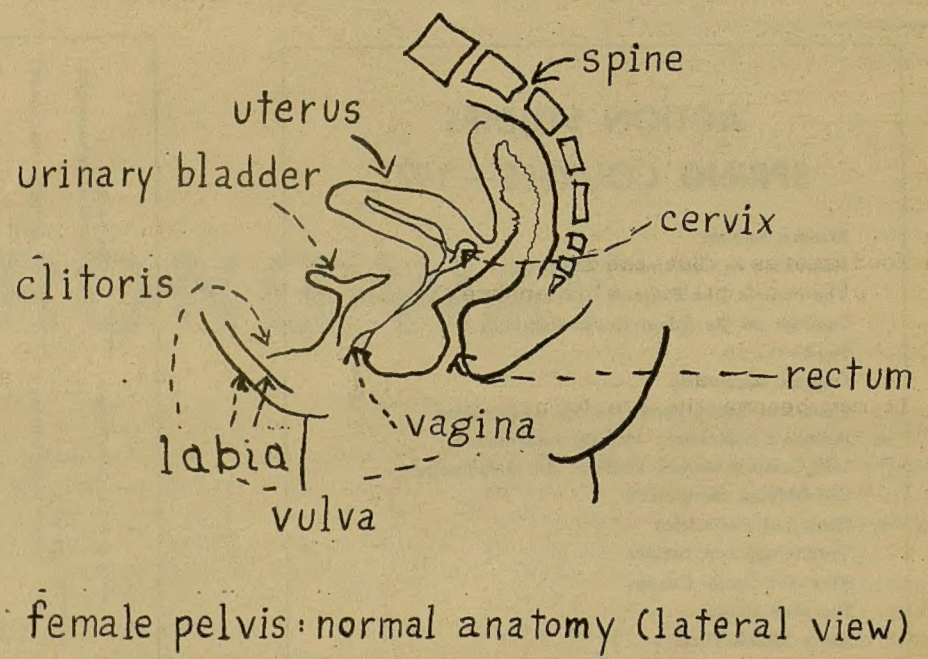
Cystitis is a painful, but not uncommon, infection of the urinary tract. Although most women will probably never get it, those few who find themselves prone to the inflamation can be forwarned by some advance information.

The major cause of cystitis is intercourse, often long and/or frequent, but it may be connected with other factors such as extreme tiredness (low resistance), alcoholic beverages or pregnancy. Some women get it so regularly that they must take medication after intercourse; older women often contract it from unknown sources which are not necessarily connected with sexual activity.

The basic problem is that the female is constructed with too many organs crammed into too small a space. Urethra, vagina and anus are all within two inches of each other, and lots of activity, like the friction of intercourse, or even the movement of an unborn child, will irritate the lower end of the urinary tract. The resultant pain may just be that of irritation or it may indeed be an infection which should not go untreated. Because the female urinary tract is only two inches or so long, such infections are not usually very serious (that is, there isn't too much of them, as compared to a similar infection in the male which is a greater problem),but will become serious if the infection is left untreated and spreads to the bladder.

How to know you've got it: first, it hurts, especially when you urinate and you feel like urinating all the time. You know the pain is down there somewhere, so try to determine if it's forward of the vagina, yet behind the clitoris. Itching & burning sensations are common. If you begin to have blood in your urine, you've got it for sure.

Get to a doctor. The inflamation is not bizzare and should respond readily to simple treatment: analysis of a urine specimen, some antibiotic for a week or so if you have the infection, then another analysis to make sure it's cleared up. The really painful symptoms should stop within four to eight hours after beginning medication--ending the pain will be your immediate concern at that point. Go easy on screwing till it's cleared up, about ten days after you begin treatment.



female pelvis: normal anatomy (lateral view)

<u>Douching</u>

Douching is one of those very unclear and somehow mysterious activities that most women think they should be doing something about, but are not sure what to believe. Most doctors now take the stance that douching as a hygenic measure has been overemphasized to the point of sometimes causing more harm than it's supposed to prevent.

Under normal conditions the vagina, if left to perform its natural functions, will keep itself perfectly clean. The vaginal lining constantly secretes thin mucus which gently washes "foreign" material, such as menstrual blood, contraceptive chemicals, and semen, down to the vulva where careful washing will remove it. If this normal secretion is not removed from the foreskin of the clitoris or behind the labial folds there is a characteristic "vaginal odor," which douching won't help.

Sometimes douching is useful. On the last day of your period a douche will remove the remaining bits of menstrual flow and avoid a day or two of spotting, if you wish. If you are one of the women who develops a normal and healthy, but messy, copious mucus discharge at the time of ovulation, a douche will temporarily slow down the discharge.

For douching an enema bag with a douche nozzle (which directs the water out to the sides against the vaginal wall) is best. Bulb syringes are less desirable because the water escapes at high pressure and does not deliver a constant flow.

To douche, sit on the toilet with the bag at shoulder height. Warm water (not hot) or warm soapy water are fine solutions, but you can safely use mild solutions of drug store preparations if you wish. Insert the nozzle as far as it will go into your vagina and when the bag is about ½ empty slowly start removing the nozzle so that the last of the water runs over the labial area. Rinse out the douche bag with warm water. You need not sterilize the nozzle. Your vagina is tough and usually resists infection very well.

Vaginitis

Your vagina is tough, but it can be messed up. Douching too frequently and taking large doses of antibiotics, among other things things, can cause the yeast-bacteria balance in the vagina to be upset. The result, whatever the cause, will be a copious foul-smelling, irritating discharge which must be treated by a doctor who can tell whether the condition is caused by yeast or bacteria. Douching is futile as a cure but these ailments can usually be easily treated by means prescribed by your doctor.

Another important reason for having a doctor investigate abnormal discharges, especially if they are accompanied by itching, painful urination, and/or lower abdominal tenderness, is that these common symptoms are also the symptoms for gonorrhea. A smear test will give you a sure diagnosis.

Cancer

And now a plug for Pap smears. All women, beginning in their mid-teens, should have a yearly Pap smear. A smear of tissue is painlessly removed from your vagina and tested for evidence of preliminary cancer stages. It's very effective, inexpensive, and easy--well worth being able to treat cervical and uterine cancer early. Most doctors understand the importance of this health measure.

You can get a Pap smear from a private doctor, or from Planned Parenthood as part of an examination for contraceptive pills. In any case you'll pay five dollars for the lab test, plus office call fee if you go to a private doctor. If you are a student, get your Pap smear from the student health center, even if you are going to Planned Parenthood for pills, so that you don't overburden PP facilities.

At the time of taking a Pap smear most doctors will also check your breasts, your other most vulnerable cancer area. Ask him/her to do so if he/she doesn't as a matter of course.

Go to a doctor immediately if you develop lumps in your breasts or abnormal vaginal bleeding. It probably will be something simple, but you need to be sure as early as possible.

Except for the section on cystitis (written out of the experiences of the females in our group), most of the other-than-local information for this portion of this article came from A Concept of Contraception, by Selig Neubardt, M.D. (Trident Press, N.Y.,1967), also in paperback as Contraception (Pocket Books, 95¢). It's an excellent and concise description of all forms of contraception (as of 1967) which includes much other useful information.

This article was prepared by the Bloomington (Indiana) Women's Liberation Front

"there is some shit i will not eat"

--e.e. cummings, "i sing of olaf"

America's food is full of shit. Like most of its products -- war, systems of control, ideology, culture; detergents, cars, cigarettes, liquor, Coke, McDonald's hamburgers -- all full of shit. Talk is going round and round about additives in food -- the additive in my food as far as I can see, is the MAN.

Those into the freak-youth counter culture seem to think they have a line on what's safe to eat & how to get it. The Man has not only fucked up the food& told us it was cool, he has also fucked up the information as to what is good for your body & how to figure what to eat. He lies about nutrition & sells us shitty food. But the freaks put out with different (and believable) info on nutrition, then find how to get it by opening health food stores & organizing food deals --but all within the system. They still don't get rid of that food additive -- what makes it all happen --profit, the Man's thing.

The Man will allow heads to open health food stores. But the Man's media and official culture will ensure that the healthy food trip is tagged as a freak & liberal culture thing & therefore a middle-class limited sideshow. It may become the "in thing" and all that shit. It will be commercialized to bits, probably, like most of the counter culture that is so within the capitalist system it doesn't necessitate revolution.

Choice of food is part of culture or subculture, part of lifestyle. But it's the range of choice that profit controls. The media reinforce the limitations on lifestyles. For middle class people, it's a liberal thing to experiment. But, fuck it, poor people can't experiment. Rich white liberals can check out "soul food" but poor blacks can't check out Delmonico steaks. The Man controls the menu: steaks, lobster and scotch for the ruling class; a little of everything on TV dinner trays for the middle class; brown rice and acid for the freaks; McDonald's hamburgers and polluted beer for the working class; and peanut butter & rotgut gin or heroin for the lower class. (Dope is in the class structure too. Where is that pure Sandoz LSD? I haven't seen it but I bet whoever has that control ought to die. And wouldn't the Man like to get the whole revoution on smack? Smack helped keep the ghettoes down for years. It was no coincidence that right after Kent State & Cambodia there was a cheaper & easier supply of heroin around college campuses and in big cities. I could go on about the politics of heroin but I feel that sisters are less susceptible to that trip, that it's really male-oriented. Other kinds of downers (tranquilizers, etc.) are pushed at women, though; calm, passive women are necessary to the Man's system.)

Faced with all this crud in our food and stuff, some of us can make the choice to change our eating habits. But some of us want more choices than the limited pure food diet. Some of us can't afford the time to bake good bread and can't afford to buy any but cheap poisonous white bread. (Pure white flour, white sugar, white rice -- there seems to be a connection. All are terrible worthless food.) Some of us have just made enough personal sacrifices. I dig brown rice but I sure as hell dig lobster. And I'm angry and I won't forget it as long as Amerikkka makes me quite literally sick to my stomach. I could buy a Burger Shit meal, walk across the street to the bank and puke it on the bank president. Dammit, we won't eat brown rice forever! We want control over our own bodies and that means what goes into them too. When you feel like you ate something that disagreed with you, and you know what and who you disagree with, your gut reaction is a political analysis. Amerikkka is revolting.

related material:

"I want to puke my guts out!!!"
-- Pat Edith

I wish I'd never seen your face
or heard your lying tongue, my lord
or heard your lying tongue
I would not be here eating this
cold cornbread
sopping this salty gravy my lord
sopping this salty gravy
--Appalachian folk song

Heroin, be the death of me...
Thank your god that I'm not aware
thank your god that I just don't care
'bout all the evils of this town
and all the politicians makin'
busy sounds
and all the dead bodies piled
on the ground
and everybody puttin' everybody
else down
oh and I guess that I just don't know
oh and I guess that I just don't know
Heroin Heroin
it's my life and it's my wife...
--"Heroin", by the Velvet Underground

This woman has the right idea: if it hurts, rub it. Headaches are caused by temporary cutting off of the blood supply to the brain; massage restores the circulation. Rub in rhythm with your pulse rate. Even scratching your head is helpful.

HOLD IT! ASPIRIN IS A RIPOFF

HEADACHE? PAIN?

THREE WOMEN TALK ON THE REVOLUTIONARY PEOPLE'S

The Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention was called by the Black Panther Party for November 27-29 in Washington DC and people from all over the country came. At the last minute James Cheek, President of Howard University refused to allow the people to use the buildings at Howard for the convention. Cheek had agreed to rent facilties at Howard to the Black Panther Party with a $1,000 deposit and the balance of $7,000 to be paid later. When Cheek received the deposit, he wanted all of the money in one payment by Tuesday morning and denied the Panthers the space.

All Souls Church and Saint Stephens Church were used as a last minute substitute, but their facilities were inadequate for holding the workshops and larger assembly meeting. The women also had a center at Trinity College, a Catholic Women's College, where space for workshops, meetings, and sleeping was provided.

LNS women went to the convention unclear about what to expect. They returned with new questions, and the realization that these questions are a long way from being resolved.

The following discussion focuses on three women's experiences at the Convention:

BARBARA: Friday night on the way to St. Stephens Church we met a lot of movement people we knew who seemed to be wandering around--they told us that the agenda we were looking for wasn't there. Sure enough, when we got there, there wasn't any agenda--there were old Huey movies and other Newsreel flicks. That was pretty grim, so went back to All Souls Church to register.

SALLY: But when we got there registration had closed so we went to eat at a fried chicken place. And at dinner we ran into other problems--of white people being in a Black community and being very unconscious of that while they were there.

Black people lined up behind us to eat. And we were sitting at the counter laughing and talking and we didn't even realize that those people were there until we turned around and they said, "We've been waiting here for 45 minutes."

KAREN: I think it's typical of the situation over the weekend that while we were sitting there talking about the revolution we didn't even bother to think that there was a whole room full of Black people who regularly ate there who wanted to sit down and have their meal. Same goes for all the trash people threw around the sidewalks and lawns around the church neighborhood.

BARBARA: Then we walked over to the rally and the first nice thing happened. We met some women who told us that there were lots of women rapping at the women's center at Trinity College. They told us to go over there. At the rally, nothing happened for a long time and then, finally, the Panther band, "The Lumpen," played. We started dancing and singing songs and continued to wonder when the convention would start. A lot of gay women and men danced in a snake dance and shouted "Ho, Ho, Homosexual, the ruling class is ineffectual."

SALLY: Big Man spoke finally and said we were all supposed to go to St. Stephens Church at 9 in the morning. He intimated that it might be a good idea if some buildings could be liberated; he also said we were going to stay in Washington as much as five months to have the convention. We all stared at each other in disbelief because we knew we weren't going to do that. The implication was that we whites were to liberate Howard, a Black school. That would have been a political disaster.

BARBARA: I finally got over to the women's center after the rally. The atmosphere was a cheerful change. People were sitting around on sleeping bags, rapping and getting to know each other. Some women were hanging around a literature table, and others poured themselves coffee and tea, and made sandwiches in one corner of a huge meeting room. It would have been pleasant and politically productive as well to have continued the evening that way; or perhaps to have broken into small random groups to find out where other people were coming from.

Instead people decided to have a meeting to discuss "What to do about the Convention." I knew there was going to be trouble. Most of us bitterly remembered Huey's preamble in Philadelphia where he never mentioned womankind--just mankind. Lots of us are turned off to calling Huey the "Supreme Commander" especially when the whole movement is so disorganized--it sounds absurd. We remembered that women had been promised a lesbian speaker at the final meeting in Philadelphia, and that the speaker had never materialized. Some women felt that the Panthers were so hopeless we should not be part of the convention at all, but should simply have a women's conference. Though most of us agreed with their criticisms of the Panthers, still we had come to Washington to help write the Revolutionary People's Constitution and we did want to show our support for the Panthers--200 of them are now political prisoners. Most of us were planning to go to the church the next day as Big Man requested and see what could be done to pull the weekend together.

Finally, it was decided that those who wanted to go to the church would and those who wanted to stay at the women's center would do that. Next morning most of us went to St. Stephen's church.

SALLY: When we got there in the morning, there was nothing to do--people were just wandering around. Black and Brown people were signing up for community organizing and leafletting but it was hard to figure out how whites were supposed to do that in the middle of a Black community in a strange town. Nothing else was scheduled until five that afternoon, when according to a leaflet the constitution wo would be read. That seemed weird to me--I thought we were supposed to be writing the constitution. We went back to the women's center where people were breaking into workshops.

KAREN: When I got to the women's center in the afternoon, there were a number of workshops going on, as well as a lot of women milling around. There seemed to be no organized way to find out who was discussing what. I finally found Barbara at the imperialism workshop.

BARBARA: We were talking about specific actions women could take against imperialism which would pull out a lot of women and educate people--we had just split from a group who were into a more theoretical discussion about women and imperialism. People described their plans for celebrations around December 20, the 10th anniversary of the founding of the NLF, and a women's march against imperialism on International Women's Day.

KAREN: For me, the projects workshop was the best moment at the convention. I got a sense of women all around the country who are beginning to think about and plan concrete actions. In addition to the things that Barbara talked about, other people are doing work on organizing women to go to the Canadian conference in March to meet with the Vietnamese women. Some women from Chicago have been working on plans for day care and medical facilities for women and children. Some women from Vermont are working on setting up a loan company for women.

The projects workshop was just gathering steam when someone came up to our group to announce that there was going to be a mass meeting to decide whether or not to try and liberate Trinity College and give it to the Panthers. On our way downstairs we thought about how groovy it would be to liberate Trinity-- a ritzy Catholic girls school on a beautiful campus--which we had gotten only because the priests thought we were all harmless middle-class white girls.

There must have been close to 1,000 women in the hall. I had never seen so many women in one place--it was an up, visually, to see throngs and throngs of us. But before most of us got any information at all about the feasibility of liberating Trinity, the discussion broke down with people shouting at each other and not letting each other speak.

Some women from Trinity tried to point out that the building was too small to hold all the people at the convention and that the Panthers had rejected it the night before. But other women felt that the Panthers might have changed their minds by now, since they hadn't been able to get any other building. This was one point where if the Panthers has sent someone over to talk to us we could have avoided a lot of hassle. But no Panthers ever came to the women's center all weekend.

BARBARA: But obviously the hostility wasn't just about tactics. Some women who were angry at the Panthers for all the reasons they laid out at the Friday night meeting didn't want to turn over the women's center to the Panthers, whether it was a practical action or not. And some women who felt committed to supporting the Panthers despite their fuck-ups weren't willing to listen to anything from these women, even perfectly logical reasons why taking the building wouldn't be cool--mainly, that it was too small.

SALLY: One depressing thing about the argument at Trinity was that so many women viewed it so much as turning the building over to the Panthers--not to the People's Convention. A Black sister pointed out that women tend to view the Panthers as the only group of third world revolutionaries. And then when we have disagreements with the Panthers the tendency is to feel at opposite poles from the whole third world liberation struggle.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

KAREN: The meeting really brought out the political splits in our movement, but what was even more discouraging in a way was the total chaos and confusion and lack of discipline and organization. People screaming at each other, ignoring the poor chairwoman, it turned so many women off. The only way you could preserve any sanity was to completely retreat from the discussion. A whole lot of people left. I don't think our movement can survive too many more meetings like that. We've got to get ourselves together and provide structures for organization and leadership, and that's not a male trip--anarchy is just as oppressive as authoritarianism.

SALLY: I know for a lot of people like me it was the first time we'd been in a national gathering of women. A lot of other women from the Midwest were there also. It was very discouraging for us that the meeting was so bad. The only good thing I can remember from that meeting was when one girl got up to speak and right in the middle of a political rap she saw a friend across the room and she got really excited and stopped right in the middle of her speech and said "Hello". Everyone in the room just roared laughing because something had finally broken the tension. I know that a number of women from the Midwest were so totally discouraged they wanted to leave and not come back. They just wanted to go back to their own cities where they had organizations built up that they knew and could work with, because they felt it is just impossible to work in this kind of situation.

We couldn't even get a resolution passed in support of the Panthers and other revolutionary people gathered in Washington, even though most of the women really did want to express their support. If we'd been more organized we could have gotten the resolution written up in a way that most women would have agreed with, and that would have been a positive thing we could have done as women.

BARBARA: We failed to do that small thing because we were so busy arguing and getting mad at the Panthers and each other. And of course we totally failed to do the necessary work of forging a movement that would be able to present our criticisms to the Panthers and negotiate with them from a position of strength so we could all get down to the business of fighting the real enemy.

SALLY: We all felt pretty down when we left the women's center to go over to the church to hear Huey's speech. He was still talking about "mankind"--"A man is less of a man if he can't pick up a gun to defend himself, or he's not a man at all"; "It's not a matter of Marxism, it's a matter of manhood." For him to be so insensitive is really bad, even when he does criticize himself and say well it's a bourgeois fuck-up of his.

BARBARA: It wasn't just Huey talking about mankind, it was the real male supremacy of that event at the church. All the guards were men. All the speakers were men--Huey, Michael Tabor, and Robert Scheer. Robert Scheer went on a trip to North Korea on which there were a majority of women. So why was it Scheer who was picked to report on the trip? A lot of us would have been really interested in hearing from the women. Also, it would have been good to hear Panther women speak.

SALLY: Another thing--we'd gotten the leaflet in the morning saying the constitution was going to be read. Now here was Huey talking about how we couldn't hold a constitutional convention in America because we hadn't liberated the territory yet. How come the people didn't get to decide that? Why did they call the convention in the first place then?

KAREN: I thought that it was kind of weird for Huey to lay down this hour-long abstract rap to people who were waiting to be told what the fuck was going on. I don't feel like I want to comment right now on his theory of vast numbers of unemployed Lumpen making the revolution, or about intercommunalism. I think a lot of people have serious questions about these things. Particularly the "nations don't exist any more" theory-- I wouldn't like to lay that on the Vietnamese or the Palestinians who are waging wars of national liberation. But whether we agree with them or not, these ideas don't seem to relate to the immediate problems of the movement in America. And he only briefly mentioned the Panther political prisoners, the fact that Bobby and Ericka might die.

SALLY: After Huey's speech I went back to the women's center, but not many women were there. Some women just came back and went to sleep, some of us just talked. The discussion I was in centered around our discontent with Huey's speech and our experiences at this convention. None of us felt like we had gotten any unity or strength from the weekend.

Sunday morning was better; a few regional meetings which had been planned the day before were still held, and ideas and plans for the NLF anniversary on Dec. 20 were exchanged. Women from New England made plans for a January regional meeting to exchange ideas and plans for future projects. The meetings Sunday seemed to be the most positive and concrete things that happened the whole weekend, yet they had almost no connection to the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention.

LNS

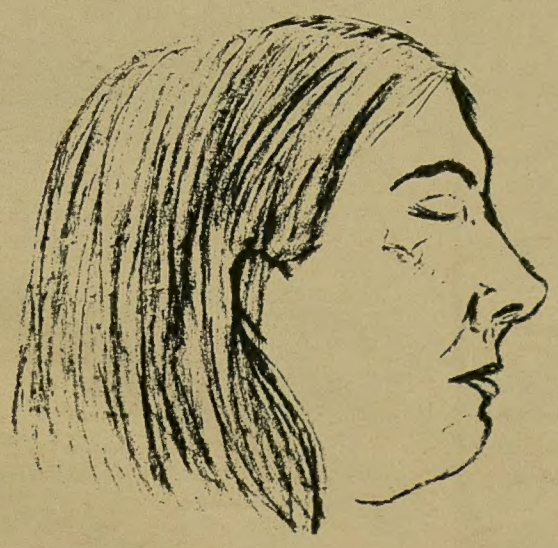
By Karen, Barbara, and Sally

Of Ann

She crossed her arms
in sleep or wakeness,
which, it doesn't matter.

She must have been aware
of the decision her fingers had made;
by the grace with which she placed them
over the strong part of her arm.

If I lie beside her,
will her hands forget their conclusion
and reach out to me instead?
Will I, sometimes, be able
to cross them back again.
And will she.



Closing my arms across my chest
is an easy thing.
I do it naturally.
But leaning across to you
high comedy
I wish I could reach out
and simply hug you;

Let go of all the crystal palaces
the bright edges and clear corners
of the words we live in.
I wish I could reach across
brush away the tinsel
the mirrors
So we could see each other as we are.

Ann Wagner

Dec. 26, 1970

Dear Sharon-share-alike, AIAW, Dirtbag, and Jill,

Before I tell you everything in order, let me describe what happened today. I met Tracy at Grand Central at 10:35 and we were to have lunch before her flight. While we were reconnoitering in in the waiting room off 42nd streat a young pimp, white (20-24) came up and leered over at Tracy "Is there anything I can do for you?" She said that there most certainly wasn't anything he could do for us and I said,"beat it". He told me that that was not a nice way for a lady to talk and sat down next to me. Well, Tracy had to call the airlines and asked if I would be sure and off him if he gave me any trouble. I said I'd be all right so she went to a nearby phone booth, but kept watch through the window while she was calling. The guy started whistling "I'll be there" very badly so as not to let me forget he was there. He had a thigh to ankle caste on his left leg so it stuck straight out. He said, "You want to make some money"? I said, "What's it to ya"? He said, "You know I'm a pimp don't you." And I said beat it or I"ll beat you up. At this point he stood up and said, "ok beat me up, beat me up". But not wanting to be arrested for starting anything I let it go--he sat down again, and began badgering me. Not only was he insulting me and calling me names, but he was employed in an occupation that I despise and made his money off the backs of women. I kept getting madder and madder until I pushed him off the bench or something,(I sort of started it, but I was real fed up) and we were standing faced off, except he had me around the neck with one hand. I still wasn't taking the whole thing too seriously so I was calmly prying loose his fingers and when I couldn't,I hit him in the mouth a couple of times, but he hit me twice in the eye and knocked me down. Then,all at once out of the phone booth jumps Tracy (who,you'll remember is 5'2"), grabs him around the neck with both hands and threw him down on the floor. He hit her a couple of times too, but she said it didn't hurt. By this time people began asking what was happening so I said loudly that the guy was a pimp and made his living by exploiting women, I called him the scum of the earth and he ran away.

Well, Tracy and I were pretty proud of ourselves, but after all that we had to sit down and rest--anyway my eye was swelling up and I had to go put cold water on it. When I got back two police were there and we gave them a description. I wasn't sure if I wanted to deal with cops at first, but then I decided that I really would love to see that pimp out of commission. He must work Grand Central Station.

The reaction of the women around was neat. One woman who saw the whole thing smiled at us and gave the victory sign and the two matrons in the bathroom were very solicitous and kind about my eye.

I've done alot of self-cross-examination about why I didn't use the karate I know to get us out of that situation. One good groin kick or side kick to the stomach would have broken his hold on my neck and done him in as well. The only thing I've come up with is that I considered myself as starting the physical part of our encounter and I associate using karate only with self-defense. Looking deep down into the pit of my soul, however, I know that's a rationalization, and I still haven't rid myself of the passivity socialized into women. I sat there and took all the personal insults he was laying on me, and I did nothing to defend my worth and dignity. The only way I was able to respond physically was in considering his exploitation of all women. It wasn't enough that he was insulting me. I've been through that movie once before where I came to the defense of one of my friends who had just been given an insult that I had grinned and beared through many times. It's not healthy for women to be so selfless. Each time you endure a blow to your person and don't defend yourself against it, you die alittle inside.

Sorry I ended so philosophically. What I really wanted to express in this letter was how proud I am that Tracy and I beat up that pimp.

Love,

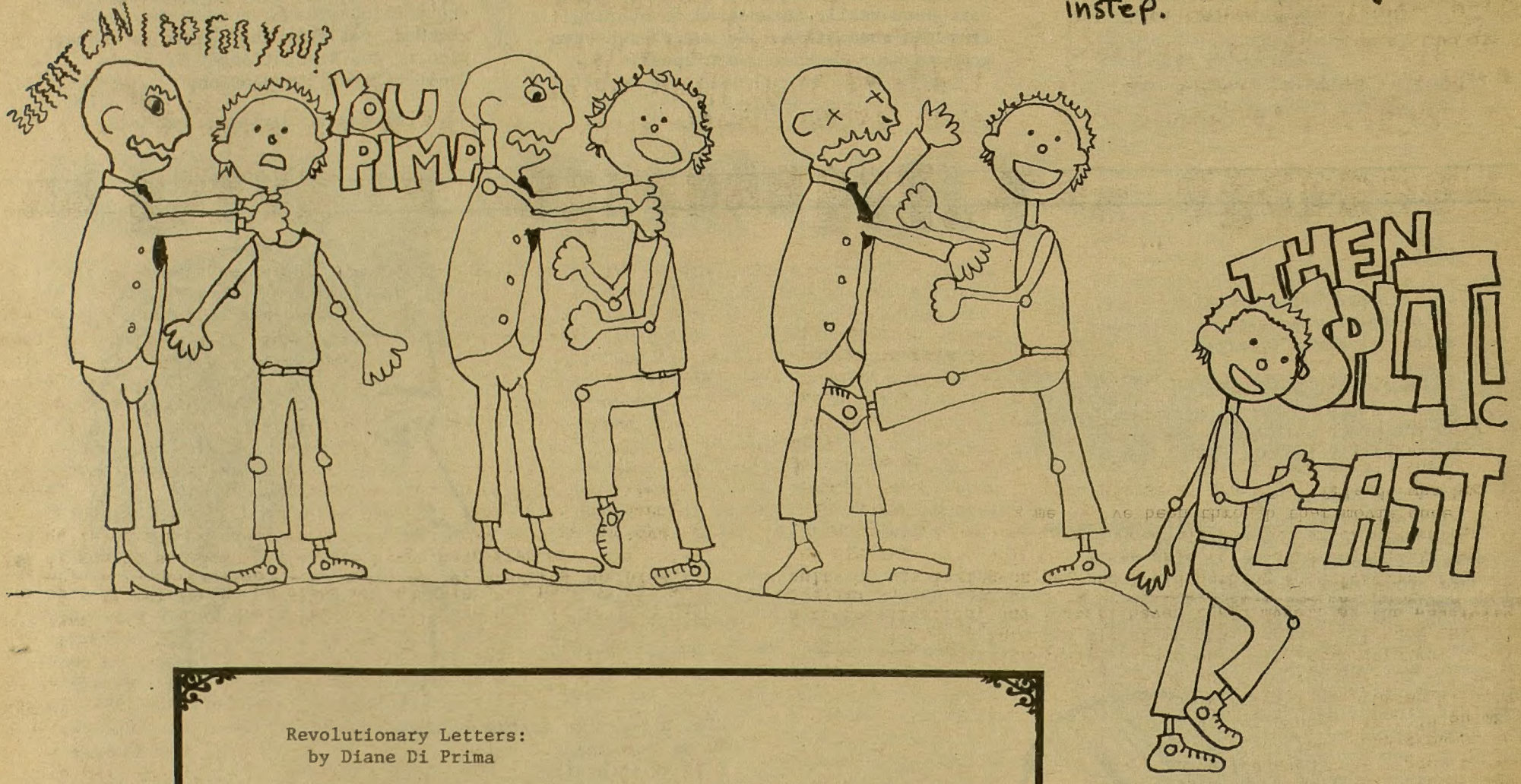
Da-Da

what i should've done

a very good defense against an attacker is a kick to the groin. Even if sloppily placed, he will double over & be unable to move.

With force raise your thigh until it is parallel with the ground - while keeping your toe pointing down.

The power of the kick comes from continuing the force of raising your thigh by snapping the lower part of your leg out & up into his groin contacting him with the bones of your instep.



Revolutionary Letters:
by Diane Di Prima

not all the works of Mozart worth one human life
not all the brocades of the Potala palace
better we should wear homespun, than some in orlon
some in Thailand silk
the children of Bengal weave gold thread in silk saris
six years old, eight years old, for export, they don't sing
the singers are for export, Folkways records
better we should all have homemade flutes
and practice excruciatingly upon them, one hundred years
till we learn to
make our own music